

Mark 6:45-52, *Found at Sea*  
Sunday, February 7, 2010  
Rev. Tom Cramer

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Exodus 14:21-25 and Mark 6:45-52  
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I.

Last week, Pastor Jeff preached on Jesus' return visit to his hometown. We saw that instead of giving him a homecoming parade, his townspeople rejected him saying, "Where did this man get all this? Isn't he just the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And don't we know his sisters too?" They rejected him, and their unbelief prevented them from experiencing the healing and reconciling power of God that so many others had experienced elsewhere.

And then, right after this rejection, as if God was using this setback as an object lesson for his disciples about the realities of ministry, Jesus sends his disciples out on a missionary journey as sheep among wolves. The disciples must have known something was up when Jesus sends them out with nothing in their pockets: no food, no money, no overcoats, nothing. Imagine starting a trip like that? You don't even have a chance to visit the nearest Triple A office to buy a map.

But Jesus has a plan for these men that requires faith, so he sends them out with nothing, not because he didn't believe in advance preparation or planning (that would have been a bad day for the Boy Scouts to be sure), but because he wanted to develop their faith. He wanted to push them out there on the edge of faith where they would be forced to depend on God to open doors and provide for their needs. He called them to be apprentices in the life of faith, so he teaches his disciples by sending them out on their own to teach the things that he was teaching and do the things that he was doing.

II.

The disciples must have seen the storm building when they returned from their ministry and they couldn't get a moment to catch their breath. Jesus says to them in chapter 6 verse 31, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." And then Mark adds, "For so many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat."

They must have remembered Jesus' teaching about the kingdom of God, and how like a mustard seed, it would grow so big that it would become the greatest of all shrubs, and because of its size, birds would make their nest in its shade—this wonderful vision of the God's provision and goodness and love. What they didn't expect, however, is how that teaching would impact them personally. Mark says that the crowds had grown so large that disciples couldn't even find time to eat much less sleep.

The disciples must have sensed a storm building when they arrived at the other side of the Sea of Galilee and found 5,000 hungry people waiting for them to heal their sick and care for their needs. The sun was setting and they begged Jesus to send the crowds away so that they

could buy something to eat, but Jesus refused to do it, and instead, shocked them by saying to his disciples, “You give them something to eat.”

### III.

This is where we meet our text for this morning. The disciples are tired, they’ve been moving around from house to house. No doubt, they had experienced the heartbreaks of ministry just as Jesus had in his hometown. They thought they were going to get some rest on the other side of the lake, but the same crowds that overwhelmed them the day before, rushed to the other side of the lake before they arrived. Well, so much for *that* retreat!

They must have felt like the Minnesota Vikings and the New Orleans Saints two Sundays ago when they got to the end of the NFC Championship Game and the score was tied 28 to 28. Both teams had played their hearts out for 60 minutes and now they had to start all over again.

I can just imagine what the disciples were thinking when Jesus said to them, “You give the crowds something to eat.” A switch must have flipped in their hearts when they heard Jesus’ words, because Mark writes later in verse 51-52, “*They were utterly astounded, <sup>52</sup>for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.*”

### IV.

Can you put yourself in the disciples’ shoes? Maybe you’re a new Christian and you were excited when you first met Christ, but *that* excitement has begun to wear off. Jesus’ sense of justice and his vision for the world seemed noble to you, or you received a sense of peace when you first trusted yourself to him; or you believed that one of his teachings helped you face some crisis or need in your life. But then, as the weeks and months wore on, you discovered that following him meant changing your priorities, and putting other people’s needs before your own, and caring for the poor and outcast, and yes, sometimes being stretched to the point of breaking. You didn’t realize that when you said “yes” to following Jesus it was going to involve bearing the sins of the world just as he had come to earth to do.

It might even go deeper for you. Maybe you’ve begun to question if Jesus is truly who he said he was? You have existential questions about your life and wonder if you’ve staked your time and energy on the wrong cause? Well, take heart, my friends, you are in the same boat that the disciples were in all those years ago when Jesus sends them out on the Sea of Galilee.

### V.

Jesus sends the disciples out on the lake, maybe to let them get ahead of the crowds while he stays behind to dismiss them. Then he goes up on mountain to pray. So, he’s there praying on the side of the lake. There’s this huge storm and he sees his disciples straining at the oars. It’s probably about 3 o’clock in the morning and the disciples have been awake since sunrise the day before.

So there’s a huge storm, he sees the storm, and then walks to the disciples. I’ve often thought about that scene. The disciples needed something about then. They needed some sort of

good shock. They needed to know that Christ cared about their struggles, too. They needed to be assured in their own faith, and Jesus did it in his own way.

Notice that Jesus comes to people in different ways at different times. There's no formula for how Jesus meets people or calls people or heals them. Sometimes he heals them and then they put their faith in him. Sometimes they have faith first and he restores them to wholeness. Jesus does things in his own way.

So here we find the disciples out on the lake and Jesus praying up on a mountain.

Mark writes: “<sup>47</sup>When evening came, the boat was out on the lake, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup>When he saw that they were straining at the oars against an adverse wind, he came towards them early in the morning, walking on the lake. He intended to pass them by. <sup>49</sup>But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; <sup>50</sup>for they all saw him and were terrified. [They were afraid.] But immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’ [They thought they had seen a ghost.] <sup>51</sup>Then he got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded.”

John's gospel adds, “They were glad to see him; so they took him into the boat.” They thought they had seen a ghost, so it was a good shock to see Jesus, and Mark adds, “They were utterly astounded.”

## VI.

Do you believe our Lord is able to find you in the midst of life's storms? All of us at one time or another have faced them. They may be practical storms, like making a bad investment, or falling sick with life-threatening disease, or trying to weather a difficult marriage. Those are practical storms and they can be tremendously difficult to navigate.

But we face existential storms too. If we're a teenager, we wonder if we're going to fit in when we grow up, or, as we get older, if the values we've chosen to guide our lives are going to stand the test of time. Or, if you're my age and older, we wonder if we've spent our life's energies on the right things or with the right people or in the right profession. As the disciples are straining at the oars in one of the windiest bodies of water on earth, they had both practical and existential questions on their minds: We're they going to survive this storm? Was following Jesus really worth all of this?

It's one thing to believe that Jesus can find *other* people, or meets *them* at their point of need, but it's another to believe that he cares for you, personally and concretely. As the disciples strained against the wind, they needed assurance that he cared for them too, so he walked out on the sea to let them know that he was present with them in the midst of their troubles.

## VII.

I find it interesting how Mark records so casually that Jesus “intended to pass them by.” It's so casual the way he mentions it, here they “were straining hard against the oars (trying to save their lives, by the way—hello!) and Mark casually writes that Jesus ‘intended to pass them by.’”

Isn't that so like us in how we deal with our practical and existential storms? We strive and we complain and get angry and pout and withdraw. We think only how the storm is affecting us. We like to blame others and make our problems their problems. We strain against the oars. We harden our hearts. But then, the only person who has history and creation in his hands, the only one who knows what's ultimately best for us, shows up, and he's not straining at all. He's just casually walking by as if it's another sunny day in the park.

Jesus isn't threatened by our storms. In fact, if there's something I want you to walk away with this morning it is this point: he knows how to find us *in* our storms.

### VIII.

So many of the miracles of our Lord are of our Lord finding people. We're not the only ones doing the seeking. He's seeking us out too. It's a sign of his grace that Jesus finds us— whether we're navigating a practical or existential storm – and then, he calls us to fulfill his purposes in history. It is a gift of grace that God uses people like you and like me to establish his kingly reign on earth. He could use someone else, but he finds us because he loves us.

Our Lord made it very clear that he could raise up children of Abraham out of the *rocks* if he wanted to, and even the rocks would shout out praise to him if chose not to. But he loves us, so he finds us instead.

### IX.

We see a woman in chapter 5 of Mark's gospel who has been hemorrhaging for 12 years. She says, "If I could only touch the hem of Jesus' clothes, I will be made well." She's a very superstitious woman really, but Jesus doesn't reject her. Instead, he draws her to himself, so she doesn't become superstitious, or become fascinated with relics or his robe. She discovers the meaning of faith and a relationship with him. And he is able to find her.

He said, "Who touched me?" The disciples make fun of him. They say, "What do you mean, 'who touched you?' -Everybody is touching you!" He said, "No, someone touched me in a very significant way. They were trying to touch me; they were trying to get through." And he found her, and then he heals her.

### X.

Our storms, our questioning, the hardening of our hearts, the wondering if we're going to make it, all of these concerns, are the very circumstances in which God finds us and reveals his purposes for us. Life is filled with opportunities to "strain against the oars." It is *also* filled with opportunities to see how God can meet us at our point of our true need and develop our faith in him.

The next time you find yourself in a storm, ask yourself, "What I missing in my own life that God wants to find and bring to wholeness in this situation?" In my experience, God rarely answers our prayers the way we pray them, or orchestrates circumstances the way we think is best for us, but he always knows how to find us, especially in the middle of our storms. He's there with us, so be not afraid when you see him.

Do you believe Jesus is able to find you? Would you be shocked if you saw him? Jesus knows how to assure some men who are really discouraged and baffled, and they are out in a storm in the middle of the night. He is able to find them, and they have a good shock. And they were glad when he gets into the boat. His concern for them overcame their lack of faith. His presence can do that. And he wants to do that in your life too. Let us pray . . .

Heavenly Father, thank you for the ways you find us. Thank you for caring for real people in real places, in the concreteness of our lives. Thank you for overcoming our lack of faith. If there is anyone in this room who is discovering your love for the first time, I pray that they would thank you, Jesus, and that they would welcome you into their lives. Lord, you know our names, and you know how to find us. And we thank you for that. In Jesus' name. Amen.